THE RAVENSWING

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with other business, or making alliances with them, furnishing the perfumer, at an enormous advance on current prices, with all his supplies. "Is Eglantine at home, Mossrose?" asked the dashing captain. "Don't know; go and look," replied Mr. Mossrose, who hated the captain. "If you are uncivil I'll break your neck, Mr. Amos!" retorted the captain—there was a rumor that the real name of Mossrose was Mr. Amos. "I should like to see you try it, Mr. Hooker Walker!" rejoiced Mossrose, from which interchange of courtesies and such discrimination in regard to names it will be seen that the two gentlemen knew each other pretty thoroughly.

Mr. Eglantine was at home, and the captain requested that that artist heat his irons and curl his (the captain's) whiskers. "Can't do it, captain," said Mr. Eglantine; "I expect ladies, captain, every minute." "Very good; I don't want to trouble such a great man," said Walker calmly; "goodby—and let me hear from you this day week."

This was a shot that brought down the game, for "this day week" meant that Walker would expect Eglantine to settle a little note which he had negotiated through the captain—and settle it upon the date mentioned. So they compromised, or rather they parleyed, and Eglantine surrendered, and curled the captain's whiskers. And, greatly to the annoyance of Eglantine, the expected ladies arrived before Captain Walker had taken his departure. These ladies were none other than the excellent Mrs. Crump and her charming daughter, Morgiana.

Needless to say, the captain prolonged his stay and made himself vastly agreeable both to Morgiana and her mother. When Morgiana's hair was let down and flowed, a dark and shining mass over her shoulders and down her back, the enthusiasm of the captain was visibly increased. The girl was handsome, there was no mistake about that, and her hair—well, it is no wonder that her admirers compared it to a raven's wing. In fact, Captain Walker, hearing the name, at once began to call her the Ravenswing. It really was wonderful hair. When it came the turn of Mrs. Crump to have her hair (or rather her "false front") dressed Captain Walker took his leave, greatly to the relief of Eglantine, who had been on pins and needless, so to speak, while the captain was present.

Now Eglantine in one of his attempts to stave off Walker in the collecting of a little bill had told him that he was expecting to be married to a young lady with a fortune of £5,000 to her name, and Walker, of course, saw at once that the Ravenswing was the heiress referred to. So he went away from the perfumer's shop saying to himself: "What hair, what eyes that girl has—And £5,000!" The shadows were beginning to gather over the love affairs of Mr. Eglantine.

Mrs. Crump and Morgiana were having their hair dressed because Mr. Woolsey was to take them to the theatre that night, and when Eglantine discovered this he was cast into a violent fit of jealous rage. It certainly was too bad of Morgiana to go to one lover to have her hair dressed in order that she might go to the theatre with the other, but such is the way of womankind. However, it did not matter much. Captain Howard Walker sought out The Bootjack renewed his acquaintance with Morgiana and her mother and completely "cut out" both the tailor and the perfumer. And this in spite ofthe fact that Mr. Woolsey and Mr. Eglantine made a temporary treaty by which they combined their forces against Walker, agreeing to renew the fight between themselves when he, the captain, should have been put out of the running. More, much more, Mr. Eglantine made a wig for Mr. Woolsey, and Mr. Woolsey made a coat for Mr. Eglantine.

But Captain Howard Walker completely defeated the allies and carried off Morgiana in triumph. Morgiana thought the captain the greatest and but a little. Morgiana, and the captain—well, he really did care a little, for Morgiana, not enough to interfere with his regard for Howard Walker, bua a little. Morgiana, and the captain were married privately and the birds came tripping home to say, "Forigve me, dear papa and mama," according to rule. And they did forgive her—why not? And pap paid her her fortune, which she took home to the captain in her reticule. Of course, when Walker found that his wife had brought him only five hundred instead of five thousand pounds he was inclined to be angry. But there was something in the manner with which the confiding creature threw her money into her husband's lap, saluting him with a hearty embrace at the same time and wishing that it was a million, million times more, so that her darling Howard might enjoy it, that made even this selfish fellow supress his disappointment and rage and give his wife a kiss instead of a blow, as he at first felt inclined to do.

In fact, he reflected, it was not she who had deceived him, but Eglantine—and then he registered a vow of vengeance against the perfumer. Besides five hundred pounds in crisp bills was more real money than Captain Howard Walker was accustomed to have in his posseession all at once and he immediately began to calculate how it could be increased and multiplied into a plum—for he was a dashing, sanguine fellow. What did the captain do with this money? Why he furnished a neat and elegant house in the Edgeware Road; he ordered a service of plate, he sported a phaeton and two ponies; he kept a couple of smart maids and groom, footboy—in short he mounted just such a neat, unpretending gentlemanlike establishment as becomes a respectable young couple on their outset in life. "I've sown my wild oats," he would say to his acquaintances. "A few years ago, perhaps, I would have longed to cut a dash; but now prudence is the word—and I've settled every farthing of Mrs. Walker's fifteen thousand on herself." And the best proof that the world had confidence in him is that for the articles of plate, equipage and furniture mentioned he did not have to pay a shilling. Had it not been for postage stamps, turnpikes and taxes he would hardly have had occasion to change one of the five-pound notes Morgiana had brought him.

To tell the truth, Mr. Walker determined to make his fortune—and what is easier? Do not Spanish and Colombian bonds rise and fall? For what are companies invented but to place thousands in the pockets of promoters and shareholders? The gallant captain plunged into the stock market with dash and enthusiam, made several brilliant hits at first, and his name began to be known as that of a rising captialist and might be seen in the list of directors of many excellent and philanthropic schemes, of which there is never a dearth in London. Poor Eglantine, as he saw the captain arrive daily in his pony phaeton at his offices and heard of the start he had made in life, used to hate him madly. Morgiana's only regret now was that business occupied so much of her husband's time day and night that she did not see much of him. Old Mrs. Crump used to go almost daily to the house in Edgeware road to see her daughter, of whose marriage she was inordinately proud and boastful, but she went there when the captain was not at home, for, of course, Mrs. Crump could not be received into the society which her daughter now began to frequent. Walker used to bring home some of his great acquaintances to dinner occasionally and there were six ladies who called upon Morginia—two attorneys' ladies, Howard's bill broker's lady and a few more of whom the least said the better, though their names sounded grand, and poor Morgiana, who did not know—how should she?—thought it a great honor to be so distinguished.

Among their purchases for the house in Edgeware Road was a beautiful little rosewood piano, and the whole neighborhood could hear Morgina at it continually, her voice gurgling and quivering and shaking as ladies do when they practice. This took up four-fifths of her time, and so Walker's blackbird in its snug little cage sang on and was not unhappy. Mrs. Walker first had for a teacher little Podmore, the fat chorus master at the "Wells.' He grounded her well and bade her eschew the singing of those popular ballads in which her heart delighted. When he had brought her to a certain point of skill the honest fellow said she should have a better instructor and wrote a note to Captain Walker, saying most flattering things about Mrs. Walker's ability and recommending that she take lessons of the celebrated Baroski. So the Captain dimissed Podmore and engaged Baroski at a vast expense—as he did not fail to tell his wife.

Benjamin Baroski was one of the chief ornaments of the musical profession in London. He had written operas and charged a guinea a lesson for three-quarters of an hour abroad. Added to this he had a school at his own residence, where pupils assembled in considerable numbers. The prima donna of this little company was Amelia Larkins, Baroski's own articled pupil, upon whose future reputation Baroski staked his own and whose profits he was to share. Has not all the world seen her since at the Theatres Royal and in America as Miss Ligonier? When Baroski came to give Mrs. Walker her music lesson Mrs. Crump was always on hand like a guardian dragon. It was easy to see that the great musician was mightily smitten with the Ravenswing.

At Baroski's little exhibitions Mrs. Walker soon achieved a fame as a singer, which even reached the ears of Captain Walker, who usually did not bother about such things, and he determined to make use of his wife's talents. He began inviting people to dinner, and to hear his wife sing, people who needed some such bait as Morgiana's voice to get them inside the captain's doors, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing his rooms filled with many great personages. And once in a while, by way of return, Morgiana was asked to parties elsewhere and treated with that killing civility which your English aristocracy knows so well how to bestow on artists. Wise and clever aristocraey! It is sweet to note your ways and study your commerce with inferior men. But let us not rail at aristocracy, for the thought occurs, was Morgiana fit to mingle and move in the best society?

Frankly she was not. She was a good, honest, clever creature, to be sure, but she dropped her Hs here and there, she ate peas with the knife, and her dress and her fallals were of the most conspicuous. Who can forget the horror of Lady Smigsmag when, at a dinner at Richmond, Morgiana asked for porter and drank it out of the pewter pot! It was a fine sight. She lifted the pot with one of the finest arms in the world covered with the biggest bracelets ever seen and a bird of paradise on her hat that curled around the pewter disk of the pot like a halo. Her laugh was loud and her grammar artrocious—so, perhaps, Morgiana were better away from the polite world.

But for a while she moved around innocently and gladly, unconscious of her blunders, in a world which he dear old mother looked up to as a sort of earthly heaven into which only the predestined could be admitted. Morgiana had some two years of this life of splendor. There were, to be sure, a goodly number of dandies and and morning visitors who came with single knocks inquiring for Captain Walker (sly dogs) just to see his wife, but they were no more admitted than they would have been to a nunnery, and the only man who had free entrance in the absence of the captain was Baroski, who, of course, came in his professional capacity.

Morgiana and her mother had by this time discovered the passion of Baroski and much fun they used to have out of it. Captain likewise was informed as a good joke of the professor's infatuation, and Morgiana used to mimic Baroski's manner of rolling his eyes and perform "Baroski in Love" for the amusement of her husband and her mama. The captain had his own reasons for overlooking the attentions of the little music master, and as for Mrs. Crump, had she not been on the stage and had many hundreds of persons make love to her in jest and in earnest? Baroski, then, was allowed to go on being in love, and if he was not successful, at least the little wretch could have the pleasure of hinting that he was and of looking particularly roguish when the Ravenswing was mentioned and of assuring his friends at the club that "upon his word there was no truth in that report."

But at last, one day, it happened that Mrs. Crump did not arrive in time for her daughter's lesson, and Baroski did. In the midst of the lesson down went the little professor on his knees and made a declaration in the most eloquent words he could muster. "Don't be a fool, Baroski," said Morgiana. Of course, she should have said "Unhand me, villain," or something dignified like that, but what she said was, "Don't be a fool; get up and finish the lesson. You lok rediklus." But Baroski, having got his speech by heart, was determined to go on, and caught hold of the lady's hand, whereupon said Morgiana, "Let go my 'and,or I will box your ears." Baroski did not let go her hand, and Morgiana cuffed him on the side of the head, which not only caused him to suddenly release her hand, but would have felled him to the floor had not the belated Mrs. Crump, who came in at that instant, rushed forward and prevented him from falling, at the same time dealing out, with all her might and main, a whole shower of slaps, such as Baroski had never endured since the days he was at school. "What impertinence!" cried the good lady; "take that, and mind your manners, you filthy little beast!" "By Jove, you shall pay me for this!" cried Baroski, bouncing up in a fury.

"As much more as you please," retorted the widow. "Augustus (to the page), was that the captain's knock? Show this imperance to the door." Baroski vanished and the two ladies, instead of being flurried and alarmed, just sat down and laughed till they cried. They agreed that it was of no use to tell the captain of the occurrence, as it would only annoy him.

Yes, the ladies laughed heartily, but Captain Walker found it no laughing matter when he was arrested next day at the suit of Baroski for two hundred and twenty guineas and, in default of payment, locked up in a sponging house in Chancery lane. When Morgiana learned what had happened to her beloved Howard she, of course, rushed off to his prison and tried to throw herself weeping into his arms. But the captain berated and abused her; told her that it was her extravagance that had brought him to this pass, whereupon the faithful woman rushed back home again and pawned all the plate in the house, thereby raising enough money to pay Baroski's debt. Having paid the claim she went joyfully in to tell her husband that he was free.

But was he free? Oh, no, for the news of the collapse of Captain Howard Walker had traveled rapidly abroad, and during Morgiana's absence at the pawnbroker's other detaining writs had been lodged against him. "You were not such a fool as to pay?" roared Walker, and when his wife falteringly said that she had paid Baroski's bill the worthy captain began abusing her in language which cannot be put down on paper. When she at length fainted he threw the contents of the water jug over her and, as she revived and shook her glossy locks, he bade her to go to Eglantine for financial help. "He was an old flame of yours," sneered the captain. But before Morgiana went on her mission the captain borrowed what little change she had [illegible] that she had to walk—and ordered a bottle of wine. At first Morgiana said that after what had passed between them she could not go to Eglantine. But Walker said, "You will go to Eglantine and ask him to [illegible] note for the amount of this shameful demand of his, and he shut it with a look which made his wife quail and consent. This 'shameful demand' was a bill of the perfumer's against the captain for supplies for five years, and figured among the debtors which had been put in against the captain.

Poor Morgiana was nearly fainting from want of food and from her exertions of the morning when she arrived at Mr. Eglantine's "Emporium." Eglantine, left to himself, would have been moved to pity and compliance, but the firm was Mossrose & Eglantine now and the financial end of it was entirely in the hands of the senior partner. So that expedition in search of succor for her adored Howard was futile. The distressed woman staggered out of the shop, and as she did so encountered Mr. Woolsey. "Good heavens, Mrs. Walker!" cried he, and soon Morgiana was telling her troubles to a sympathetic ear. Help had come at last, and for the rest of her life Morgiana had the sheltering care of the honest and chivalrous tailor. It was found useless to try to make any settlement of Walker's debts, the captain himself said it was useless, and determined to "go through the courts," as he had so often done before. Of course he loudly berated his wife and told her and everybody else who would listen to him that her extravagance had brought him to ruin. And the faithful, trusting creature began to really believe that it was through her that her husband had come to grief. As to the number of "queer" concerns in which the captain was interested that matter was a public scandal when it came out, but he had kept just inside the line of legality so that they could not send him to prison for fraud, though the fraud was apparent enough.

So we now behold the Ravenswing installed with her mother and a little baby—yes, to make matters more complicated, a little wanderer from the regions unknown had come to Morgiana—installed, I say, in a little cottage in a modest quarter of London, where, with the help of Mr. Woolsey, skillfully and secretly bestowed, and the income of her mother, the once dashing Mrs. Howard Walker got along as best she could, sorrowing all the while for the hard fate of her husband and giving him every penny she could lay hands on in order that he might luxuriate in the Fleet Prison, to which he had been removed. She pawned everything she could and gave the money to Howard, who grumbled because it was not more, and had a royal time in his dungeon cell. She carried the baby on one of her daily visits to the Fleet in order that its fond papa might see it; but the captain was so visibly annoyed, and so evidently considered the child as another of Morgiana's extravgances, that she didn't take him again. The crisis of Mrs. Walker's self-abnegation came when one day the baby, in infantile play, pulled off its mother's cap, and Mrs. Crump and Woolsey, who happened to be present, discovered that Morgiana had cut off her beautiful hair.

Then the whole story came out. She had cut off her hair and sold it in order that her husband might have money to gamble and drink with in prison. Mr. Woolsey forced from her the miserable story of her sacrifices for her unworthy husband, and said that if she would promise to discontinue such practices he would give Captain Walker a certain allowance regularly. He went to see the captain and, as much as he loathed and despised that adventurer, made the same proposition to him. The captain glad of a certainty instead of the intermittent amounts Morgiana could give him, accepted, after haggling for as large an amount as he could get.

How to help Morgiana was a question; she would gladly accept help for her worthless husband, but would not allow Woolsey to help her if she knew it. The kind-hearted tailor had, at the sale of the furniture in the house in Edgware road, purchased for Morgiana the little rosewood piano at which she used to sing and before which Baroski created the scene which resulted so disastrously for the Walker family. At this piano Morgiana used to practice when she was not busy with the baby, and now a bright thought occurred to Woolsey. Morgiana's voice was undoubtedly a superior one. She should resume her singing lessons and become a public singer—a prima donna! When she realized that by going on the stage she might make money and help her beloved Howard, Morgiana eagerly consented to the plan, the expense to be refunded to Mr. Woolsey out of her first earnings.

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